A SERMON

Preach't before the

SOCIETIES

For Reformation in

DUBLIN:

Jan. 6. $169\frac{7}{8}$.

By *J. Boyse.*

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To the *Societies* for Reformation in *Dublin.*

AS *this* Sermon *was* Preach'd *at your* Requeſt, *ſo ſince you have thought the* Publication *of it might be uſeful to promote the ſucceſs of that* Excellent Work *you are Engaged in, I have herein alſo comply'd with your* deſire. *For tho' I am very ſenſible how far ſo* mean *a* diſcourſe *falls beneath the* Dignity *and* Importance *of ſo* great *a* Subject, *and how little* Credit *or* Advantage *your* Pious Undertaking *can derive from the recommendation of ſo* inconſiderable a Name, *yet I have too hearty an Affection to this bleſſed Cauſe to be backward in contributing my utmoſt (tho' but* a ſmall Mite *) towards the Advancement of it. But I greatly rejoyce that there are ſome do eſpouſe it, the Eminency of whoſe* Character *and* Station *renders 'em capable of giving greater* Reputation *and* Encouragement *to it. As to this* Diſcourſe, *I have, upon the Review of it, obſerv'd, That ſomething might have been added* to Vindicate the preſent Method of Convicting one ſort of Offenders from the Cenſures 'tis too commonly loaded with. *But having more fully offer'd ſomething to that purpoſe in another* Diſcourſe (viz Concerning Profane Swearing and Curſing) *then the limits of my time wou'd allow in this* Sermon, *I muſt referr the Reader thither. For your ſelves 'tis matter of great ſatisfaction and Joy to all that wiſh well to your worthy Deſign to find the* Regularity *of your* Methods *in Executing it, ſo anſwerable to the real* Excellency *of it. For I have as yet heard of no well-grounded Complaints of any* illegal ſteps *you have taken, or of any that can juſtly pretend to have ſuffer'd by any* falſe Informations. *I doubt not you will continue the ſame exactneſs and Care in all your future proceedings; and give none the leaſt ground to charge you with going beyond the bounds of the* Laws of Man *in your zeal to ſuppreſs the Violation of the* Laws of God. *And ſince your Enterprize is ſo truly* Religious *and your Management of it ſo unexceptionably* fair, *I am not without hope that this* Diſcourſe *may convince ſome that have hitherto contented themſelves with only*

wiſhing well *to it, of their indiſpenſable Obligation to* join *with you, and become more* active *in it according to their capacity and opportunities of being ſerviceable to it. And there is the greater need of a conſiderable Addition to your Numbers, becauſe your Zeal muſt not be confin'd to this* City *while this neceſſary Work is ſo wofully and generally neglected in* other parts of the Kingdom. *For it will require your utmoſt united intereſt and application to engage ſo many in this Deſign as may be capable of ſetting it on foot in moſt of our* populous Towns. *And yet till that be done, you cannot expect the Reformation will be* General *and truly* National; *So that without this, there will be great danger leſt thoſe Vices that ſeem now like a* routed *and* flying *Enemy, ſhould again* rally *their forces, and at laſt* defeat *all your hopeful attempts for the cruſhing of 'em. Let then the preſent* ſatisfaction *of your being ſo highly ſerviceable to the undoubted intereſt of your* Bleſſed Lord; *Let the* view *of his* own *bright* Example, *of whom it was ſo juſtly ſaid, That* the Zeal of God's Houſe had eaten him up; *Let the certain* proſpect *of a future and glorious Recompenſe; Nay, let the* conſideration *of that* gracious providence of God *that has hitherto ſmil'd upon your Endeavours, and given you the comfort of beholding already ſo happy Effects of 'em,* recon ile *you to all the continued hardſhip and ſelf-denial, the difficulties and toil of ſo great an Undertaking.* Be not weary of well-doing, *but proſecute this glorious Work with an unſhaken Reſolution and perſevering Conſtancy, till your great End be attain'd, till the Intereſt of* Religion *and* Vertue triumph *over that of* Irreligion *and* Vice, *and theſe publick* Sins *become as* unfaſhionable *and* rare *as they are* deteſtable *and* pernicious. *And that the Great God whoſe Cauſe you ſo ſtrenuouſly continue to maintain, may* unite *your Hearts in the firmeſt bonds of mutual Love, That he may* proſper *your pious Endeavours wi h more* remarkab e ſucceſs here, *and* crown *'em* hereafter *with his* Heavenly Reward, *is the hearty prayer of,*

Your unfeigned Well wiſher,

J. B.

A SERMON PREACH'T

Before the Societies for Reformation, Jan. 6. $169\frac{7}{8}$.

Nehemiah 13. Ver. 15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22.

VERS. 15. *In those Days saw I in* Judah *some treading Wine Presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in Sheaves, and lading Asses; as also Wines, Grapes and Figs, and all manner of Burdens which they brought into* Jerusalem *on the Sabbath Day; and I testify'd against them in the Day wherein they sold Victuals.*

16. *There dwelt Men of* Tyre *also therein, which brought Fish and all manner of Ware, and sold on the Sabbath to the Children of* Judah, *and in* Jerusalem.

17. *Then I contended with the Nobles of* Judah, *and said unto 'em, What Evil Thing is this that ye do and Profane the Sabbath Day.*

18. *Did not your Fathers thus, and did not our God bring this Evil upon us, and upon this City? Yet ye bring more Wrath upon* Iſrael *by Profaning the Sabbath.*

19. *And it came to paſs when the Gates of* Jeruſalem *began to be Dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the Gates ſhou'd be ſhut, and charged that they ſhou'd not be opened till after the Sabbath. And ſome of my Servants ſet I at the Gates, that there ſhou'd be no Burden brought in on the Sabbath Day.*

20. *So the Merchants and Sellers of all kind of Ware lodged without* Jeruſalem *once or twice.*

21. *Then I teſtify'd againſt 'em, and ſaid unto 'em, Why lodge ye about the Walls? If ye do ſo again, I will lay Hands on you: From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath.*

22. *And I commanded the* Levites *that they ſhou'd cleanſe themſelves, and that they ſhou'd come and keep the Gates to Sanctify the Sabbath Day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this alſo, and ſpare me according to the Greatneſs of thy Mercy.*

SInce 'tis the deſign of this Diſcourſe to recommend to you that Noble Work of *Reforming* a Licentious Age, and to *Encourage* and *Direct* your reſolute endeavours in it; I have fixt my Thoughts on this remarkable Paſſage, which ſets before you ſo illuſtrious a *Pattern* as that of Pious *Nehemiah*. A *Pattern* on ſeveral Accounts moſt worthy of your Notice and Imitation. *Partly* in reſpect of his eminent *Quality* and *Station*. For not only the Title of *Tirſhatha* or *Governor* ſo often given him; * but the whole Hiſtory of his Tranſactions plainly ſhews, he had a conſiderable Authority among theſe reſtored Captives, whom by a Commiſſion obtain'd from *Artaxerxes* he encourag'd to Rebuild the Walls of *Jeruſalem*. *Grotius* ſuppoſes he was one of the chief Members of the great Councel of their Nation. And you may by the way Obſerve, how deſirable a thing it is to behold *Secular Honour and Power* in ſo happy a Conjunction with *exemplary Piety and Vertue*. *Partly*, Becauſe the *Circumſtances* of this great attempt of *his* for Reformation bear no inconſiderable reſemblance

* 2 Ezra, 63 v. 7 Neh. 65. x. 1.

reſemblance to your own. And *chiefly*, Becauſe in his *Management* of this attempt, and in the *Succeſs* it was Crown'd with, you may Obſerve much both to *Guide* and to *Animate* your Holy Zeal: You may both diſcern the true *Characters* of the excellent Spirit and Temper of a Pious Reformer, and the happy *iſſues* in reference to the Publick and to himſelf, that were the Reſult of his Religious Undertaking. So that my Text, without offering the leaſt violence to it, will of it ſelf ſuggeſt to you the moſt ſuitable and inſtructive thoughts for this preſent Occaſion.

I ſhall not now ſtay to take notice of thoſe many other generous and pious Deſigns which this Great and Good man not only undertook, but happily executed in the face of the moſt formidable difficulties, and violent Oppoſition. I ſhall only Obſerve, That having joyn'd with the reſt of the *Princes* the *Levites* and *Prieſts* in ſolemnly *Renewing and Sealing their Covenant with God*, he particularly applied himſelf to the concerns of his *Houſe*, reſtoring the *Offices* of the *Prieſts* and *Levites* in the Temple, and appointing *Treaſurers* to diſtribute what the Law of *Moſes* requir'd the other *Tribes* to contribute towards their liberal Support. * But becauſe the bare ſetting up God's publick Worſhip will ſignify little to promote the great deſign of practical Religion, if the *ſtated Seaſons* he has appointed for it be alienated from that Sacred to a common Uſe. Therefore this excellent Reformer ſeeing the *Sabbath of God* (that Day of Sacred Reſt, ſet apart for the Contemplation of his Works and Word, and for the ſolemn Exerciſes of his Publick Worſhip *) thus openly profan'd by the generality of the People; he begins and proſecutes this pious attempt of Reſcuing it from ſo notorious Pollution, and of Reſtoring the Religious Obſervance of it.

* See 9, 10, 11 and 12 Ch.

* 2 Gen. 2, 3. 4 Luke 16. 13 Acts 5. 14.

I ſhall not now ſtay to Paraphraſe the Text, both becauſe it needs little Explication, and becauſe what may be any way requiſite will occur in proſecuting thoſe *Obſervations* I ſhall make on this remarkable Paſſage for your preſent *Inſtruction* and *Uſe*. And I ſhall among many, that might be made, ſelect the following ones.

I. We

I. We may from the matters of Fact mentioned in this Historical Passage, Observe, *That Prophaneness and Licentiousness do usually soon come to a great height, even among a People professing the True Religion, when they are countenanc't and strengthen'd by the Example of those that are of the highest Rank and Figure.*

You know nothing was more directly contrary to the Law of *Moses* than the doing any servile Work on their Sabbath. The fourth Precept of the Decalogue was most express to this purpose; *Six Days shalt thou Labour and do all thy Work, but the Seventh Day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any Work, Thou, nor thy Son, nor thy Daughter, thy Man-Servant, nor thy Maid-Servant, nor thy Cattle, nor the Stranger that is within thy Gates,* &c. Even the *Strangers* were forbid to do any servile Work on the Sabbath, least their Example shou'd ensnare the *Jews* in the guilt of Profaning it. And indeed in this point the *Law of God* enjoyn'd no more on the *Jews*, than what the *Light of Nature* it self did dictate to the *Heathens*; Viz. *That that part of Time which was Devoted to the publick Worship of the Deity, shou'd not be employed in any thing that is inconsistent with it, or a real hindrance to it.* Insomuch as * *Macrobius, Servius, Festus* and others tell us, The *Heathens* themselves thought *any servile Works*, (that were not of pure necessity) *a Pollution of those Days that were Consecrated to their Gods.* So that the Practices here mention'd in the Text, of *treading Wine Presses, bringing in Sheaves*, &c. *selling Fish, and all manner of Ware*, were most gross and palpable Violations of the Fourth Commandment, and even against the *Morality* of it. For sad experience sufficiently tells us, how soon all the impressions of Religion upon the minds of a People are generally lost and defac't, where either they seldom attend the Publick Worship of God at all, or where they are at Liberty to rush immediately from their *Publick Devotions* to their *Secular Affairs* or *sensual Pastimes*. 'Tis indeed no Wonder the Men of *Tyre* who disown'd the God of *Israel* shou'd make no scruple of Profaning his *Sabbath*. But that these restored Captives (so newly come out of those Calamities, that this among other sins had brought upon 'em *) shou'd be so generally involv'd in this hainous Guilt, seems more

* Macrob. Saturn. lib. 1. c. 16. Serv. Honor. in Virg. Georg. 1. Fest. v. Religios.

v. 18.

more ſtrange and unaccountable. But the wonder will ceaſe when we conſider, That our depraved Nature has a ſtrong Averſion to the ſerious Exerciſes of true Piety, and for want of a ſpiritualized Appetite to reliſh a true delight in 'em, is prone to reſent any long continuance of 'em as an unſufferable Wearineſs: * That theſe irreligious Inclinations in this People were the more deeply rivetted from the Conjunction of their worldly Intereſt and Gain. * They were too zealous Votaries of *Mammon*, to ſpare ſo much time for God, and were far more intent upon their *Traffick* than their *Devotions*. But that which ſeems chiefly to have harden'd 'em in this inſtance of Profaneneſs, was the Example of their *Nobles* themſelves. * And no wonder the Body of this People ſhou'd by their *Avarice* as well as *Irreligion*, be drawn ſo deep into this Guilt; when *thoſe* that ſhou'd have *reſtrain'd* this Impiety in others, by their *Authority*, did rather *Encourage*, and as it were, *warrant* it by their own *Practice*.

* 1 Mal. 13.

* 8 Amos 5. v.

* v. 17.

Now all the Reflection I ſhall make on this Obſervation, is only to ſuggeſt to you, That we need the leſs wonder, to meet with ſo great Difficulties in our attempts to Reform the Vices of the Age, when we not only conſider the agreeableneſs of 'em to the propenſities of our vitiated Nature, but the general countenance they have had, even from too many of higheſt Rank and Authority. Alas; 'tis too evident a Truth to be now conteſted, That during the two late Reigns, a Torrent of Profaneneſs and Irreligion, Immorality and Lewdneſs, came in upon theſe Lands with an irreſiſtible Violence. Theſe *Vices* having once gain'd the Aſcendant in a diſſolute Court, ſoon came into Faſhion and Repute. *Swearing* and *Lewdneſs* paſt for modiſh Accompliſhments; and to ſpend at leaſt one part of the *Lord's-Day* in *Drinking* and *Gameing*, was ſo far from being thought a Crime, that the ſtrict and religious Obſervance of it, was rather ridicul'd as a *ſcrupulous preciſeneſs*; Nay, I had almoſt ſaid Branded, as a piece of *Jewiſh Superſtition*. The very Air of Reverence and Seriouſneſs in Publick Devotion, was laught out of Countenance, and no Man thought himſelf qualify'd to ſet up for a Wit, without a ſtock of Profaneneſs. And the Contagion of theſe Vices having diffus'd it ſelf a-

mong a great part of our *Nobility* and *Gentry*; their Example did not only powerfully *Recommend*, but even ſeem to *Authorize* 'em among their *Dependents* and *Inferiors*. So that the pernicious Infection did from the tainted *Head* and *Crown*, ſoon ſpread it ſelf to the remoteſt *Parts* of our *Body-Politick*. And no wonder that theſe Sins came to ſo dreadful a height, when they Reign'd ſo long *uncontrolled*. For how indeed cou'd we expect that theſe Crimes ſhou'd have been puniſht, when thoſe that ſhou'd have executed the Laws againſt 'em were uſually the chief Tranſgreſſors of 'em. Since then theſe Vices are ſo ſuited to our Native Corruption, ſince they have been ſo rivetted by long continued Cuſtom, ſince they have been ſo univerſally diffus'd, and ſo long Triumph't without any check or oppoſition; we muſt look for almoſt as deſperate Reſiſtance in all our attempts againſt 'em, as he that wou'd ſtem a violent Stream, or raiſe up a Digue to ſet new bounds to the ſwelling Sea. 'Tis true indeed, we have no reaſon to look upon the difficulty as inſuperable (as I ſhall more fully ſhew anon): But I am ſure we have no reaſon to grow *remiſs* in our Attempts from any vain hope of ſo great a Work being *eaſily* effected. Our Conqueſt over the Vices of the Age, like that over a veterane and reſolute Enemy, muſt be gain'd *ſtep by ſtep*, not without a tedious ſtruggle and conflict. We muſt therefore lay our account for long and perverſe Oppoſition.

II. We may from the Argument which Pious *Nehemiah* inſiſts on, in his Reproof to the Nobles of *Judah* obſerve, *That when Profaneneſs and Immorality become National, (by being Univerſal and Uncontroll'd) They uſually bring the heavy Judgments of God upon the Place and People, where they ſo notoriouſly abound.*

Thus *Nehemiah* reminds theſe reſtored Captives, That this among other National Sins had brought on their *Fathers* the diſmal Calamities of a Deſtructive *War*, and a long and miſerable *Exile*, and upon their *Capital City* it's deplorable *Deſolation* and *Ruins*. *What evil thing is this* (ſaith he, verſ. 17, 18.) *that ye do, and Prophane the Sabbath-Day, did not your Fathers thus? and did not our God bring all this Evil upon us, and upon this City? Yet ye bring more Wrath upon* Iſrael, *by Profaneing the Sabbath.* Nor is this the only Sin that is ſaid in the Holy Scrip-

Scriptures to draw down publick Judgments. For among other Sins for which a Land is ſaid *to mourn*, and *every one that dwels therein to languiſh*, *Swearing* leads the Van, and *Adultery* brings up the Rear. IV. *Hoſ.* 2, 3. See to the like purpoſe the words of the Prophet *Jeremiah* XXIII. ch. 10. v. And you may obſerve, that when God by the ſame Prophet had charg'd the Jews with turning their external Plenty, into fuel to their bruitiſh Luſts, with *committing Adultery, and aſſembling themſelves by Troops in the Harlot's Houſes*; he adds, *How ſhall I pardon thee for this? ſhall I not viſit for theſe things*, ſaith the Lord, *ſhall I not be avenged on ſuch a Nation as this?* v. Jer. 7, 8, 9. *verſ.* And what is ſaid concerning theſe particular Vices, is equally applicable to all other inſtances of heinous Impiety and Immorality, when they become *National*, *i. e.* when they are *generally* committed, and that *openly and inſolently without any reſtraint and check from publick Authority*: When all Ranks are involv'd in the guilt of 'em, even Rulers too, by practiſing 'em themſelves, and conniving at 'em in others.

There is indeed very much in the *natural tendency* of Irreligion and Wickedneſs when they riſe to a great height, to ſink a Nation into Contempt and Miſery. The Vices of a People often drain their Treaſures into the hands of Forreigners, who being more frugal, enrich themſelves at the expence of their Luxury and Intemperance. And a long courſe of unreſtrained Lewdneſs, ſo emaſculates the Spirits of a Nation, and debauches 'em into that effeminacy and ſoftneſs, that makes 'em an eaſy Prey to every powerful Invader. Beſides, there is ſo inſeparable a Connexion between *Piety* towards God, and *Juſtice* and *Truth* and *Charity* towards Men, that when once the *Bonds of Religion* are caſt off, thoſe other *Cements of humane Society* are eaſily diſſolv'd. And where thoſe are once diſſolv'd, a People need not the Sword of a Forreign Enemy to deſtroy 'em; their own Luſts will ſoon bring 'em into a State of War, and make 'em turn their hoſtile Swords againſt one another; They will *bite and devour till they are conſumed one of another.** * 5 Gal. 15.

But, beſides the natural tendency of ſuch National Sins, *The Puniſhment of 'em is much more aſcertain'd by the Juſtice of God.*

And

And therefore the *Pſalmiſt* ſpeaks of it, as the uſual Method of his Providence, *To turn a fruitful Land into Barrenneſs, for the Wickedneſs of them that dwell therein*; 107 Pſalm. 34 verſ. And the Prophet *Jeremy* delivers it as the Stated Rule of his Government, with reſpect to theſe collective Bodies of Men; *At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my ſight, that it obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good wherewith I ſaid, I would benefit 'em.* 18. Jer. 9, 10. 'Tis true indeed, theſe publick Judgments are executed on ſome Nations *ſooner*, and in a *leſſer* degree, as Warnings to 'em; On others they are executed much *later*, and in a more *terrible* manner, when by filling up the meaſure of their guilt, they are ripened for deſtructive Vengeance. But where ſuch National guilt is perſiſted in, Divine wrath will *ſooner* or *later* come either in *monitory* or in *deſolating* Judgments. And the reaſonableneſs hereof is obvious. For (as has been often obſerv'd) tho particular Perſons are capable of future Rewards and Puniſhments, which are therefore moſt uſually deferr'd to another Life; Yet Publick Societies, as ſuch are not. They will all be disbanded before the Great Day of final Retribution; and therefore, if they be Rewarded and Puniſh't at all, as Communities or Collective Bodies, (as 'tis highly congruous to the Wiſdom and Juſtice of the Divine Government that they ſhou'd) it muſt be in this Life. And accordingly they uſually are, either *Proſperous* or *Miſerable*, as either *Piety* and *Vertue*, or *Irreligion* and *Vice*, abound in 'em, and meet with publick Countenance and Encouragement.

On this *Obſervation*, I ſhall only make the following *Reflections.*

I. We may hence ſee the apparent Neceſſity of our vigorous Attempts, to ſuppreſs Profaneneſs and Immorality, in Order to the Prevention of National Judgments.

We have already found by ſad Experience, That our publick Sins, (and I think we may juſtly add, thoſe in particular, which we are now deſirous to give ſome check to; Viz. *Our Profanation of God's Holy Name and Day, and our Lewdneſs and Impurity*) had a deep hand in thoſe Calamities that ſo lately befel this Kingdom, and almoſt laid it entirely waſt.

It

It was theſe Sins ſo polluted our Land, as to cauſe it to caſt out ſo many of it's defiled Proteſtant Inhabitants. It was theſe that brought our Holy Religion, as well as all our civil Intereſts on the very brink of imminent Deſtruction, ſo that, had not the Mercy of God prevented our Fears, as well as our Deſerts, our Iniquities had prov'd our entire Ruin. We need not therefore go as far back as the Age of our Fathers, for ſuch awful Examples of Divine Juſtice; We yet feel the ſevere effects of it, and bear upon us ſome viſible *Scars* of thoſe deep *Wounds* that our Sins have given us. And truly, the Great God has by our preſent Deliverance only given us a Merciful *Reprieve*, and put us upon a New Tryal, whether we will become a Reformed, (*i. e.* a Religious, a Juſt, and a ſober) People. So that from the ſucceſs of our preſent endeavours to remove this heinous Guilt from the Nation, we may take the trueſt Meaſures, whether our preſent Tranquillity and Peace ſhall be Prolong'd, or whether we are Reſerv'd for more terrible Deſtruction. *If theſe Pious Attempts Proſper*, We may hope a Gracious God will continue his true Religion among us, when the Honour of it is reſcued from that open Contempt that the Profaneneſs of the Age had caſt upon it, and eſpecially, when the genuine Spirit of true Devotion is ſo ſenſibly reviv'd in it, even among thoſe of the Riſing Generation. We may hope he will reſtore, nay, encreaſe our external Proſperity, when 'tis no longer generally abus'd to Pamper and Feed our Bruitiſh Luſts. Whereas, *if theſe Attempts decline and fail*; if Magiſtrates do not encourage the Execution of the excellent Laws that are made, or you grow negligent of your Duty, in order to the Convicting and Puniſhing Offenders; if theſe Vices ſhall at laſt Triumph over this feeble oppoſition, and ſtill Return upon us with the ſame unreſtrained Violence as before; We may all tremble to think how diſmal an Omen this will be, of ſome unforeſeen, but deſolating ſtroke of Vengeance that is coming upon us.

2. I wou'd hence expoſtulate a little with the Profane and Lewd Sinners of the Age, in the like Language as *Nehemiah* did with the *Nobles* of *Judah*, *What Evil Thing is this that ye do?* Will you ſtill expreſs your Wretched Contempt of God, and of his ſolemn Worſhip, by profaning that holy day that

is conſecrated to it? Will you ſtill dare by your inſolent Oaths to affront and tear his glorious and ſacred Name? Will you ſtill by your odious Curſes (a worſe Dialect then that of Hell) trifle with his tremendous Juſtice, and ſet it at open defiance? Will you ſtill by ſottiſh Exceſſes, and by the hateful Impurity of abominable Luſts defile the Land? *Will you yet bring more Wrath upon our Iſrael?* Have we not already ſufficiently ſmarted under the ſeverity of God's righteous Judgments? Will you ſtill encreaſe the large Score of publick Guilt, and add more fuel to kindle anew the conſuming Flames of his terrible Anger? Is this all the Return you make to the admirable Mercy of God, in reſcuing you from your late Dangers and Fears, to become more bold and ſecure in the contempt of his Authority, and open violation of his Laws? *Has he deliver'd you, that you might more freely commit all theſe Abominations?* Has he given you this deſirable *Peace on Earth*, that you might more preſumptuouſly renew your deſperate *War againſt Heaven*? O deceive not your ſelves. Miſtake not this prolonged *Patience* of God for a *Licenſe* to offend him, with greater hope of Impunity. For his Juſtice, that is arm'd with Almighty Power, will not always be *outdar'd* by the provocations of hardned and inſolent Sinners; but if you go on to incenſe him with ſo deſperate a Preſumption, he can make your *Plagues* as *wonderful* as your *Crimes* are *aggravated*, and puniſh you as you have Sinn'd, *with a high Hand, and an outſtretched Arm.*

8 Luke 23.

7 Jer. 10. v.

3. I wou'd hence apply my ſelf to thoſe of you, that are engag'd in this great Deſign of Publick Reformation. And you may here learn ſome of the excellent Principles that you ſhou'd be Acted by in the proſecution of it; Viz. *A deep Veneration for the Laws of the Great God; a profound Reverence of his Sovereign Authority; an awful dread of his vindictive Juſtice, and a deep concern to avert the terrible Effects of it from this ſinful Land.* I know indeed, The Profane and Licentious Sinners of the Age, are ready in their Blindneſs and Paſſion, to call you as *Ahab* did the *Prophet*, *the Troublers of* Iſrael. But you may juſtly reply as he did, *'Tis they that trouble our* Iſrael, *by forſaking the Commandments of God*, and thereby incenſing his Indignation againſt us. 1 *Kings* 18. ch. 17 verſ.

'Tis

'Tis *they* are the *Zimri's* whose vile *Impurities* threaten us with new *Plagues* from the Hand of Heaven. O then, Let your belief of God's dismal Threatnings, and earnest desire to prevent the Execution of 'em, powerfully excite you to imitate the Noble Zeal of pious *Phineas*; (I mean no farther then by promoting in your Station the Execution of our just Laws) and that with the same end in your Eye; Viz. *To turn away the Wrath of God, that he may not Consume us in his Jealousie*; (See 25 Numb.) And if one Act of such Religious Zeal in *Phineas* cou'd arrest the avenging Hand of God, and stop a consuming Plague; if *Jerusalem* had been *Pardon'd* and Spar'd, if *a Man cou'd have been found in it that Executed Judgment*; (see 5 Jer. 1. v.) What may we not expect from your united and ardent Zeal for the Honour of God! Let it then quicken your resolute Attempts, to dam up this strong current of Impiety and Wickedness, to consider, That you are thereby endeavouring to stop the torrent of those desolating Judgments, that wou'd soon overflow us, if the flood-gates of Sin were set as open as before. So that, you are at once doing the highest Service to the *Publick Interest*, as well as to the *Glory of God*.

III We may from this passage farther Observe, *Tho' the suppression of National Sins be principally the Work of the Civil Magistrate; yet all shou'd concur in it, that are capable of being regularly serviceable in promoting it.*

I speak here of the suppressing of Wickedness by the *coercive Power of the Sword*. (For 'tis that my Text leads me to consider.) 'Tis into the Hands of the Civil Magistrate that the Sword of Justice is put by the Sovereign Majesty of Heaven. He is thereby constituted the *Guardian* of both *Tables* of the *Law*, and is therefore oblig'd to promote the Observance, and to restrain the open violation of its excellent Precepts. He is *the Minister of God, appointed by him as a Revenger to execute Wrath upon Evil-doers* 13 Rom. 3, 4. And indeed, if he do not so manage his Power, as to render it *a Terror to all such*, by restraining their publick and enormous Vices, he so far *bears the Sword in vain*, by not answering the great End for which he is entrusted with it. And 'tis the

Magistrates

Magiſtrate's Authority muſt give Vigour and Force to all regular Attempts this way; and 'tis their Zeal and Reſolution muſt put Life into 'em. And accordingly, You ſee in my Text, it was *Nehemiah the Governour* that here ſet this excellent Work of Reformation on foot. 'Twas he rebuk't the Nobles of *Judah*, for encouraging this Profanation of the Sabbath. 'Twas he commanded the Gates to be ſhut; and by his threatning of juſt Severity, put a ſtop to that ſhameful Traffick, by which that Sacred day was Polluted.

But ſince the effectual ſuppreſſion of Profaneneſs and Wickedneſs, tho' warranted by the Magiſtrate's Authority, does neceſſarily require many Hands to concur in it; I therefore add, *That all ſhou'd be ready to joyn in ſo excellent a Deſign, ſo far as their regular Endeavours in their Station can be Serviceable to promote it.* Thus this pious *Reformer* orders the Gates of *Jeruſalem to be ſhut*, he ſets his *Servants* there to *ſtop any burthen from entring into 'em.* And becauſe the People would probably pay a greater reverence to the *Levites*, he orders them to *keep the Gates*, that they might reprove the People for their profanation of the Sabbath, and urge 'em to the Sanctification of it. Thus were *all proper hands* ſet at Work to carry on ſo neceſſary and Religious a Deſign.

On this *Obſervation*, I ſhall only make the two following *Reflections.*

1. We may hence ſee matter of great thankfulneſs to God, and of Encouragement in this excellent Work, That our Magiſtrates, to whom it principally belongs, are ſo far engaged in it.

What reaſon have we to bleſs and adore the divine Majeſty, that he has incited and directed thoſe that are entruſted with the legiſtative Authority, to enact ſo excellent Laws againſt the profanation of his holy Name and Day; That he has fill'd ſo many inferior Magiſtrates with Zeal for the Execution of 'em. But above all, how ſhou'd our hearts be chear'd, and our hands ſtrengthened, by that publick Declaration which our gracious Sovereign has ſo lately made, "*That he eſteems it as one of the greateſt Advantages of the Peace,* "*that he ſhall now have leiſure,* as for other important Affairs, "ſo particularly for this, *of effectually diſcouraging Profaneneſs and*

" *and Immorality.* O may the *King of Kings* cõnfirm theſe Pious purpoſes in his *Royal* Heart, and inſpire him with ſuitable Reſolution and Courage in the happy Execution of 'em! May the *Reſtoration* of the *Honour* and the *vital Power*, as well as the *Preſervation* of the *External Profeſſion* of the *True Religion* among us, be the principal *Glory* of his Reign! May his eminent *Conqueſt* over the *Vices* of the Age (the moſt *Dangerous* and *deadly* of all our *Enemies*) add a *New* and *Brighter* Luſtre to his Crown! While others ſtain their Government by ſuch unwarrantable acts of blind Zeal, as the *extinguiſhing the Light of Divine Truth*; may his become truly Illuſtrious by ſuch commendable inſtances of regular Zeal, as the *ſuppreſſing* the unqueſtionably Evil, and pernicious *Works of Darkneſs*! May our *Publick Reformation* moſt eminently begin where our *Corruption* did *before*, at our *Court*, and amongſt our *Nobility* and *Gentry*; that there may be a happy Conjunction of *Great Examples* with *Juſt Authority*, to put Irreligion and Wickedneſs (if poſſible) out of countenance, and to retrieve the declining Reputation and Intereſt of true Piety and Holineſs!

Nay, We ſhou'd not in our Thankfulneſs to God, overlook the wonderful efficacy of his Grace, in exciting the Zeal of ſo many *private Chriſtians* to concur in this excellent Work, tho' under the greateſt Diſcouragements. And eſpecially, when we conſider, how deeply the contagion of Impiety and Lewdneſs had infected our *Youth*; What a ſurpriſing Mercy is it to behold ſo many of them, ſo reſolutely engaging in this Religious Deſign.

To Obſerve ſuch a Spirit of warm Devotion ſpreading it ſelf among thoſe of the Riſing Age; to ſee them prefer the *ſtrict Exerciſes* of *ſerious Piety*, before the *folly of Plays* and the *Riot of Taverns*; to ſee them, not only to renounce thoſe Luſts *themſelves*, which their Age has uſually the ſtrongeſt propenſity to, but to contribute their utmoſt Endeavours to ſuppreſs 'em in others; to behold them ſo *declared Enemies* of Irreligion and Vice, and ſo *vigorous Abettors* and *commendable Patterns* of Godlineſs and Sobriety; this is ſo *marvellous* an inſtance of Divine Grace; 'Tis ſo *aſtoniſhing* and *reviving* a Sight, that we cannot but look upon it, as a happy Prognoſtick of future good, and from thence conceive *Great* and *Glorious* hopes concerning the enſuing Age.

2. We ſhou'd hence be all of us excited to do our utmoſt towards the advancing this excellent Deſign, according to our capacity and opportunities of promoting it.

Thoſe concern'd in the framing of our Laws, have already done *their* part. Nay, they have laid a conſiderable Obligation on Inferior Magiſtrates to do *their* part alſo, by ſubjecting thoſe to Penalties that neglect their Duty. But yet it were much to be wiſht, that all our *Juſtices of the Peace* wou'd imitate the Activity and Zeal, which *ſome* of 'em in this *City* have (to their perpetual and deſerved Honour) ſet 'em ſo Noble a Pattern of. I mean, That they wou'd animate and encourage the Zeal of *honeſt Informers*, and do their utmoſt, by their prudent management of this Affair, to Cover and Protect 'em from the Notice and Malice of thoſe enraged Offenders, whoſe Reformation they truly ſeek. *Conſtables* ſhou'd alſo perform their part with Integrity and Diligence, with Courage and Reſolution. They ſhou'd not be acceſſary to theſe Vices, by their connivance at, or partial Lenity to Offenders. Nay, *all* that can contribute to the ſucceſs of this great Undertaking, by giving *Informations* againſt Vice, ſhou'd alſo faithfully do their part. And indeed, 'tis chiefly on private Perſons now, that the main ſtreſs of this important Work is devolv'd. For 'tis on your Reſolution and Induſtry to convict Offenders, that the Execution of theſe good Laws, and the happy effects we hope thereby, almoſt entirely depend. For without continued Convictions, theſe Vices will ſtill go Unpuniſht. And conſequently, the profane and proffligate Sinners of the Age, will ſtill perſiſt in their Wickedneſs, with as ſecure contempt of the *Sword of Juſtice* in the *Hand of the Magiſtrate*, as hitherto, of *that* in the *hand of God*. Whereas the more active your Societies combin'd for this excellent purpoſe are, and the more the Numbers of Informers do encreaſe, the leſs hope of Impunity can ſuch Offenders entertain; and the happier proſpect we ſhall have of that deſired ſucceſs, which will both anſwer the *End* of theſe *Laws*, and therein the *Wiſhes* and *Hopes* of all *Good Men*. Let none of us then, think our ſelves excus'd from any Service we are capable of, in ſo juſt and ſo glorious a Cauſe. Let it be rather our *laudable*

dable Ambition to have ſome hand (according to the advantages our ſeveral Stations give us) in carrying on ſo *Great* and ſo *Good* a Work.

IV. We may from this paſſage farther Obſerve, *Tho' thoſe that are engag'd in this excellent Deſign of Publick Reformation, may be but few, and may have great Oppoſition to encounter; yet this ſhou'd not deter 'em from the vigorous proſecution of it.*

We may evidently infer this from the *Circumſtances* that *Nehemiah* was here involv'd in, and from his own *Reſolute Practice* under 'em. If he had only conſider'd the Obſtacles he was like to meet with, he had never begun an attempt that promis'd ſo little ſucceſs. The inſtance of Profaneneſs which he ſet himſelf againſt, was univerſally ſpread; he had all thoſe *Forreigners* upon his hands, whoſe Trade and Gain he entrench't upon. He had the profane Humour of the *People*, forti y'd by their worldly Intereſt, to bear down. Nay, which was more formidable, he had the *Nobles* themſelves to contend with, and was neceſſitated to carry this Point over their warm Oppoſition. And yet you ſee, all theſe Difficulties, did rather whet and inflame, than abate and cool his Pious Zeal. He expoſtulates with the *Nobles*, he oppoſes his Authority to *popular* Diſcontent, and threatens the *Forreigners* that occaſion'd this Profaneneſs by their avarice, with juſt Severity. He applies himſelf with undaunted Reſolution and unwearied Diligence, to remove every Rub out of the way, and to encounter and maſter every Difficulty that he met with: He thought the Glory of God, the Honour of his Law, and the Publick Good, too deeply concern'd, to be ſo eaſily affrighted or diſheartned from his Duty.

Let me then propoſe *this admirable Example of his to your Imitation, who are engag'd in the like Religious Undertaking.* I need not tell you, That tho' we have ſo excellent Laws enacted, for the ſuppreſſion of Profaneneſs and Vice, how few there are that appear zealous and active for the Execution of 'em. The Numbers of thoſe that are engag'd in the proſecution of this Glorious Deſign, do as yet, bear but little proportion to the Number of Offenders, and to the due extent of the Work it ſelf. Nor need I tell you, what Diſcouragements

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ments you lye under; and what a Train of terrifying Difficulties you have yet to encounter. Difficulties ſo *Great*, eſpecially in reference to other parts of the Kingdom, that ſome who have been urg'd to make ſuch attempts in the Country, have inſiſted on this as their chief Objection, *That they had no proſpect of ſucceeding in 'em.* The Number of Offenders being ſo great, and ſo few others, having either any *Inclination* or *Courage* to convict 'em. And even in this *City*, when we conſider, how few of thoſe that are moſt capable do encourage the Deſign. How great the Malignity and Rage of convicted Offenders is, and what hazard all that are active in this Cauſe run, of expoſing themſelves to their ill-will and revenge; we muſt confeſs, the Work is attended with extraordinary and formidable Hardſhips.

But yet after all, None of theſe Difficulties ſhou'd Diſcourage us from our Duty. Nay, they ſhou'd rather reinforce than extinguiſh our Holy Zeal, in the Diſcharge of it. We ſhou'd be ſo far from being tempted thereby, to deſert ſo Glorious a Cauſe, that we ſhou'd be rather excited to greater activity for the advancement of it: As will appear, if we conſider the following particulars.

1. *Great Difficulties muſt be expected in proſecution of ſo Pious a Deſign.*

We muſt look for it, That thoſe that carry on ſo Dangerous an Attempt, to ſubvert the *Devil's* Intereſt, will meet with warm and fierce Oppoſition. All the *Militia* and *Poſſe* of that *Infernal Kingdom* will be Rais'd againſt 'em. Satan will inſpire all his Inſtruments and Agents (thoſe *Sons of Belial*) to unite their *Policy* and *Power*, that they may withſtand and fruſtrate ſo bold an Attempt, that ſo directly threatens Ruin to his Uſurped Empire and Throne. As no ſooner did *Lot* offer a gentle Reproof to the impure Inhabitants of *Sodom*, but they preſently fly in his Face, with *Reviling Scorn*, and *furious Threatnings*. 19 Gen. 9. verſ. We ſhou'd therefore be fore-arm'd with the conſideration hereof, and enter on this great Work, as expecting the utmoſt reſiſtance in it.

2. *The Proſpect of Difficulties will not exempt us from our Obligation to ſo plain a Duty.*

I ſay, *To ſo plain a Duty.* For I take it to be as certainly our Duty, to endeavour the ſuppreſſion of heinous Profaneneſs and Immorality, according to the advantages and opportunities that our ſeveral Stations give us, as it is to advance the Kingdom of God, and to promote the Honour and Obſervance of his Laws. I do not ſee, how any can be excus'd from this neceſſary Work, that are capable of being regularly ſerviceable in it. For here is now, in this our Age and Day, a manifeſt Conflict, between the Kingdom of *God*, and that of *Satan*, between the intereſt of *Piety* and *Vertue*, and that of *Profaneneſs* and *Vice*. And can we think it conſiſtent with our Duty, (even with our Baptiſmal Obligations themſelves) to ſtand *Neuter* in ſo important a *Cauſe*, or to ſuffer the Intereſt of God and Holineſs to Sink, and that of Irreligion and Immorality to Prevail, thro' our wretched *Lukewarmneſs* and *Indifferency*? Is this reconcileable with that ardent Affection to that bleſſed Majeſty, and that entire devotedneſs to his Honour and Service, that we pretend unto? Is this conſiſtent with the ſincerity of thoſe publick Prayers for Reformation, which we have ſo often offer'd up, to uſe no Endeavours to promote it, when ſo fair an advantage is put into our Hands? May we not juſtly apply thoſe remarkable Words of our bleſſed *Saviour* to this particular Caſe, which he ſpeaks in reference to the general oppoſition of the Devil's Intereſt to his; *He that is not for me is againſt me.* 12 Matth. 30. verſ. Even as in caſe of a Forreign Invaſion, That Subject that is not *for* his Rightful Sovereign, is by juſt interpretation *againſt* him. So in this Caſe, he that does not cordially and openly eſpouſe the Cauſe of God, ſhall be regarded and treated as a ſecret Enemy to it.

Now, If this be ſo evident and important a Duty, no Difficulties will warrant our willful neglect of it. For when we oblige our ſelves to the Duties of Chriſtianity, we are allow'd no *Reſerves*, of only performing 'em ſo far as is conſiſtent with our Safety and Eaſe. Our Profeſſion in ſuch caſes, requires the Exerciſe of Fortitude and Courage, of Patience and Self-denial. It obliges us to Sacrifice our Temporal Intereſt and Reputation, to the Superior Intereſt of the Glory

of God, and allows us not to baulk any eminent Service to him, becauſe we cannot perform it without conſiderable Toyl and Hazard. No, we ſhou'd look on ſuch Obſtacles and Difficulties in our way, as rather deſign'd to try the ſincerity and fervour of our Zeal, the ſtrength and conſtancy of our Reſolutions. And therefore, the proſpect of 'em, ſhou'd rather inſpire us with new force and vigour. For as the pretence of a *Lyon in the Street*, is but the *Sluggard*'s Excuſe; ſo to be affrighted by every appearance of Danger, from our undoubted Duty, is but a ſuſpicious Character. For, among thoſe that are ſaid to have their Portion in the Infernal Lake, the *Fearful and Unbelieving*, (the timorous Cowards in the Cauſe of God) are plac't in the very Front of 'em. 21 *Rev.* 8. *verſ.*

3. *Shou'd we fail of ſucceſs in this great Deſign, yet we have deliver'd our own Souls.*

The Guilt of publick Profaneneſs and Wickedneſs will not lye at our door, when we have done our utmoſt for the reſtraint of it. Nor ſhall our Fidelity, tho it may want ſucceſs with Men, want acceptance with God and a liberal Reward from him.

4. *We have no reaſon to be diſcourag'd by the great difficulties in our way from all hope of ſucceſs.*

For our ſucceſs depends on his concurrence and bleſſing, to whoſe Power no Obſtacles we can meet with, are inſuperable.

But this leads me to the next Obſervation.

V. We may from the happy iſſue of *Nehemiah*'s undertaking, Obſerve, *That the Great God is often pleas'd to Crown the ſeemingly weak attempts of his Faithful Servants for his Cauſe and Intereſt, with unexpected and wonderful Succeſs.*

Of this, My Text gives us a lively Inſtance. For tho' *Nehemiah*'s ſingle Zeal ſeems to have been the only Spring of this Attempt, to recover the Religious Obſervation of the Sabbath; and tho' he had ſo general and ſtrong Oppoſition to contend againſt; yet you ſee by his Vigour and Reſolution, he carried the point, and brought about the Reformation he intended. That bleſſed God, who had inſpired his Heart with

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ſo excellent a Deſign, ſtrengthning his Hands in the Execution of it, and bending the hearts of others to a complyance with his juſt Authority, and Religious Undertaking. And no doubt, it did much facilitate the ſucceſs of his Endeavours, that the Law of God did ſo evidently condemn the practice he Oppos'd. So that, thoſe who had *Inclination* enough to ſo ill a Cauſe, as that of *Profaneneſs*, yet were almoſt *aſham'd* to appear for it; And thoſe who might have had an *ill Eye* upon his good Deſign, yet had ſcarce the *Confidence* to oppoſe it; their own Conſciences being convinc't of the *Reaſonableneſs* and *Equity* of it.

Let us then *draw abundant Encouragement to theſe our Religious Endeavours, from the conſideration of our being engag'd in the Cauſe of God, and from the proſpect of his powerful Aſſiſtance and Bleſſing.* Let us fortify our own Reſolutions, with the Argument that pious *Nehemiah* elſewhere uſes: *The God of Heaven he will Proſper us, therefore we his Servants will Ariſe and Build.* 2 Neh. 20. His mighty Power can make the weakeſt Inſtruments ſucceſsful, to pull down theſe *Strong-holds* of Sin, and can make uſe of *Babes* to quell his moſt formidable *Enemies.*

And truly, we have already had that Experience of the favourable Providence of God, ſhining upon our Religious Undertakings of this kind, that wou'd render us inexcuſable, ſhou'd we diſtruſt his future Aids. And to convince you hereof, I need only ſet before you, the following brief account of the Societies for Reformation, both in *London* and in *this City.* And, becauſe the account of 'em is intermixt with that of the *Religious Societies of young Perſons*, I muſt touch a little on both.

For the *Religious Societies of young Perſons* in *London*, belonging to the *Eſtabliſh't Church*, that Pious conformable Divine, *Mr. Woodward*, tells us; "The firſt Riſe of 'em was "about twenty Years ago. About that time, ſeveral young "Perſons being touch't with a tender ſenſe of their Souls, "applied themſelves to Religious Thoughts. And, as they "often accidentally met at the Houſes of their Miniſters, "they were by ſome of them, adviſed to meet once a week, "and to apply themſelves to good Diſcourſe. And, for the "better Regulation of their Meetings, ſeveral Orders and

"Rules

" Rules were given 'em. In pursuance whereof, they continued " their Religious Meetings, till *K. James*'s Reign. And " tho' the Aspect of publick Affairs, did then discourage " some, yet others of them continued their pious Resolutions " and Practices, tho' they took the most prudent course for " concealing their Meetings. In the beginning of this Reign, " they were accus'd to the *Bishop of London*, as *tending to* " *Schism*. Upon which, they presented their Apology, " which being confirmed by the Testimony of their Ministers, " gave full Satisfaction. And having then greater encourage- " ment, they quickly encreas't to 25 Societies, within the " compass of the Bills of Mortality, besides those since form'd " at *Shadwell* and *Greenwich*. And what Sense our late " excellent *Queen* had of these Societies, the *Bishop of Salisbury* " acquaints us in his *Memoirs* of her. " *She hearkned* (saith " he) *carefully after every thing that seem'd to give us some hope,* " *that the next Generation wou'd be better then the present, with a* " *particular Attention. She heard of a Spirit of Devotion and* " *Piety that was spreading it self among the Youth of this great* " *City, with a true Satisfaction. She enquir'd often, and much* " *about it, and was glad to hear it went on and prevailed, which* " *was her hearty Wish and daily Prayer.*

" Now, out of these *Religious Societies* at *London*, there have " been *two associated Bodies* form'd, who have made it their " Endeavour to inform against Profaneness and Vice, meeting " weekly to carry it on, according to the legal and pru- " dential Rules, which some Lawyers drew up for 'em. In " which work, besides time, labour and reproach, some of " 'em have run considerable hazard of their Lives.

" He tells us also, There is another eminent *Society* in " *London*, consisting of many considerable *Gentlemen*, and *chief* " *Citizens*, who frequently meet, to super-intend, direct, and " pursue this glorious work of Reformation, consulting the " best methods to carry it on, and promoting it, by large and " honourable Contributions. By which means, several *thou-* " *sands* of *Drunkards*, *Swearers* and *Profaners of the Lords-day*, " have been brought to just Punishment.

" Besides this *Society*, many *Justices of the Peace* meet weekly " on this Design.

" Then

" There is alſo, ſaith he, an active *Society* for Reformation, " conſiſting of about Sixty Perſons, moſt *Houſe-keepers*, in, " and about the *Tower-Hamlets*, to whom ſeveral *Perſons* of " the City are joyn'd, with ſeveral *Church-Wardens*, *Conſta-* " *bles*, and other *Officers*. All theſe, tho' of *different Perſua-* " *ſions*, joyn againſt Profaneneſs and Debauchery. And theſe " have put down ſeveral Markets kept on the Lords-Day, and " ſuppreſt ſome hundreds of Houſes of ill Fame. And by " the induſtry of this Society alone, about two Thouſand " lewd Perſons have ſuffer'd the Penalty of the Law, ſuitable " to their Crimes.

" On which account, They have had great Countenance " from ſeveral Courts of Judicature, and great Encourage- " ment from the *Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen*, who have " Honourably contributed towards the neceſſary Expences " of ſo great an Undertaking.

" And ſo far are the Perſons concern'd in this Great Work, " from having any proſpect of Gain by it, That (he tells us) " *One* of theſe *Societies* has in three years paſt, expended " above 700 l. in it.

Thus far *Mr. Woodward* in reference to the *Societies at London*.

For thoſe *Societies* that have combin'd *here*, for the ſame excellent purpoſes; They are too well known to your ſelves, to need my giving any particular account of 'em. Nor is it, I ſuppoſe, either agreeable to your own deſires, or proper for the Deſign you are engag'd in, to deſcend to any particular account of your Rules, and the methods of your managing this great Affair. I ſhall therefore, content my ſelf with this general Remark, That I think you have in a ſhort time, gone a great way towards copying the excellent Pattern that *London* has ſet, (a due allowance being made for your great diſadvantages.)

But I muſt not forget to pay that juſt Honour, that is due to *thoſe of you*, that belong to the *Eſtabliſh't Church*, That 'tis *you*, both in *London* and *here*, that *began* this Pious Deſign, of putting the Laws againſt Vice in Execution. And indeed, you had on many accounts, far greater advantages to begin it; and particularly this conſiderable one, That your known

Zeal for and adherence to the Eſtabliſh't Church, cut off from the Profane and Licentious part of the Age, all pretence of running down this excellent Work, as if it were only the *factious Deſign* of a *Party*. But ſince you have led the way, I hope *Proteſtant Diſſenters* will not fail to tread in your Glorious Steps, but will joyn both their *Hearts* and their *Hands* with you, in thus advancing the Intereſt of unconteſted Piety and Virtue, on the Ruins of Irreligion and Vice. Nay, I hope that our thus *Uniting* in this eminent Service to the Cauſe of our *Common* Lord and Maſter, will lay ſome Foundation of a happy *Union of our Affections*. I hope we ſhall hereby be more fully convinc't, how much more *great* and *valuable* thoſe things are, wherein we are happily *agreed*, then *thoſe* wherein we yet *differ*; And that the few differences in Opinion or Practice, which yet remain, ſhou'd no way obſtruct that mutual unfeigned *Love*, which we ſhow'd always bear to all thoſe *that Love our Lord Jeſus in ſincerity*. We are (Bleſſed be God) happily united in the main Intereſt of Practical Holineſs, and need little more towards perfecting our Concord, then *the making the great things of Chriſtianity, which we all own, the only Terms of our mutual Communion*. But to return from this *Digreſſion*, I ſhall now add, That conſidering your Circumſtances and Numbers, I think that the great God has as remarkably own'd and ſucceeded your diligent attempts for Reformation here, as he has thoſe of our Brethren in *London*. For, beſides the conſiderable progreſs you have made towards ſuppreſſing *Lewdneſs*, and reſtraining the open *Profanation of the Lords-Day*, I am well aſſur'd that there have been near 3000 *Convictions*, of ſuch as have been Guilty of *Curſing* and *Swearing*, ſince the Enacting the late *Law* againſt theſe *deteſtable Vices*. And indeed, the ſucceſs of your Endeavours is ſo remarkable in reference to this laſt particular, that I think 'tis with great Satisfaction obſerv'd, and acknowledg'd by all good Men. For that vile Language of *Aſhdod*, or rather that abominable *Dialect of Hell*, that us'd ſo conſtantly to grate our Ears whenever we walk't the Streets, is now comparatively, but ſeldom heard. That horrid *Impiety*, that was before ſo *loud* and *inſolent*, has now in a great meaſure ſtopt it's mouth. So that the *Number* of

Offenders

offenders which ſeem'd at firſt ſo *diſcouraging*, begins very ſenſibly to *decreaſe* upon our hands. And I doubt not you will find that many of thoſe difficulties, which at firſt view ſeem'd inſuperable, will be conquer'd by a ſteddy Reſolution. And truly, what we have already gain'd is a conſiderable ſtep. We may hope that the *Habits* of Vice will be gradually broke, when the ordinary *Practice* of it is ſo much refrain'd. And we may hope, that it's curſed Contagion will be in a great meaſure ſtopt, when the inſtances of it are comparatively *rare*, ſeldom appearing in *Publick View*, and not without great hazard of *Diſcovery* and *Puniſhment*. So that, the Licentious Sinners of the Age, will be no longer hardned by the *Commonneſs* and the *Impunity* of their Crimes.

Be not then afraid (my Brethren !) of encountring all the Oppoſition of a Profane and Lewd Generation. For, let me tell you, That *Vice*, after all it's empty Noiſe, is but a *Sneaking* and *Cowardly* Thing. It's Votaries themſelves, are generally aſham'd to own ſo vile a Cauſe. Whereas, the Cauſe of Piety and Vertue, which we eſpouſe, ſhou'd inſpire all it's Friends and Abettors, with a *Courage* anſwerable to the *Juſtice* and *Excellency* of it. What is ſaid of the *Devil* himſelf, may be applied in ſome meaſure to his *Ignoble Vaſſals*; *Reſiſt him, and he will flee from you.* 4 James 7. And I hope, you have too great Zeal and Reſolution for the Cauſe of God, to be affrighted from it, by a few threatning Words, or daunted with every appearance of Danger. Nay, I doubt not, the Offenders themſelves, if they wou'd ſpeak the truth, do in their Conſciences believe, that you are acted herein with a ſincere Zeal for the Glory of God, and the Intereſt of Religion; ſince you can have no proſpect of Worldly gain by it, but have a certain proſpect of great Hazard and Toyl. And whatever language their preſent paſſion may ſuggeſt, if they are ever truly reclaim'd, they will applaud your Zeal, and thank you for your Fidelity. Go on then, boldly to attack theſe *Goliahs*, theſe inſolent Vices of the Age, that have ſo long *defy'd the God of Iſrael*, and affronted his Sacred Authority and Laws. 'Tis his bleſſed Cauſe you plead, and 'tis his Protection and Aſſiſtance you may expect. He can Honour the moſt *deſpiſed* Inſtruments, to effect the moſt *Glorious* Purpoſes of his Grace

and

and make even *Mountains* of Difficulties, a *Plain* before *Zorobabel*. Let me then beſpeak, both *Magiſtrates* and *Miniſters*, and *private Chriſtians*, in the Words of God, by the Prophet *Haggai*, to thoſe employed in rebuilding the Temple; *Yet now be ſtrong, O* Zorobabel, *ſaith the Lord, and be ſtrong, O* Joſedec, *the Son of* Joſhua *the High-Prieſt, and be ſtrong all ye People of the Land, and Work, for I am with you, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts.* 2 *Hag.* 4. *verſ.* And may your Language in compliance with this encouraging Exhortation, be like that of the People to *Nehemiah*, when he told 'em, *of the good Hand of God upon him, and of the King's Words which he had ſpoken to him*; They ſaid, *Let us Riſe up and Build, and ſo they ſtrengthned their Hands for this good Work.* 2 *Neh.* 18. And what do we know, but that this Work of Reformation, which is but now as a *Cloud, no bigger than a Man's Hand*, may by the Divine Bleſſing, *ſpread and cover the whole Land.* Your exemplary Zeal and Activity in this *City*, may do much to excite the like in *other parts* of the *Kingdom*. And we may hope, That *Profaneneſs* and *Immorality* will not long ſtand their Ground, if once, both *Magiſtrates* and *Miniſters*, and *private Chriſtians*, heartily joyn their Endeavours for the ſuppreſſion of it.

VI. We may from this Paſſage, farther Obſerve, *That our Reflections upon our own Zeal and Fidelity, in ſuch ſelf-denying Services to the Intereſt and Cauſe of God, will be ſweet and Comfortable, and give us great Encouragement to hope for God's Gracious Acceptance and Reward.*

This we may clearly infer from *Nehemiah*'s Prayer, upon the review of this inſtance of his Pious Zeal. *Remember me, O my God, for this alſo.* He had offer'd the like Petition before, on the like Occaſion, *Remember me, O my God, for this, and wipe not out my good Deeds that I have done for thy Houſe, and for the Offices thereof*, v. 14.

And hence it evidently appears, That, as he cou'd in this Undertaking appeal to God for the *ſincerity* of his *Intentions*, as well as the *goodneſs* of his *Actions*. So he look't back upon 'em with inward *Serenity* and *Peace*. He had the reviving Teſtimony and Euge of his own *Conſcience*, and thereby was rais'd to the comfortable Hopes of *God's* Gracious *Approbation*, and

and of that Glorious *Recompence*, which he has promis'd to all them that ſincerely ſerve him. He therefore prays, That God would regard this ſolid Proof of his ſincere Affection with a favourable Eye, and as it were, place it on Record, among other Evidences of his Integrity towards him. See the like Prayer of good *Hezekiah*. 38 Iſ. 3.

Let us then *be careful, ſo to diſcharge this part of our Duty with Integrity, That our Reflections thereon may be thus comfortable to us.* Let us take care, That in all our Attempts for Publick Reformation, we act from truly *Divine Principles*; from a juſt hatred of Sin, and profound eſteem of the Laws of God; from an unfeigned Regard to his Honour and Intereſt, from a hearty Zeal for the Publick Good, and from Charitable Inclinations towards the Offenders themſelves, being much more deſirous of their being *Reclaim'd*, then of their being *Puniſh't*, and urging the Execution of the Laws no farther, then is requiſite to attain the end of 'em; Viz. *The Diſcouragement and Reſtraint of theſe Vices.* Nay, See that your *Conduct* in this matter be anſwerable to theſe excellent *Principles.* Let not your Zeal in any Caſe, Tranſport you beyond the bounds of the *Law*, to the leaſt prejudice of any Man's *Civil Liberties and Rights.* Uſe your utmoſt caution againſt proſecuting ſo *good an End*, by any *Irregular or unwarrantable Means.* For nothing can more effectually wound your Deſign, than your giving occaſion for any juſt complaints of this kind.

But while you are Conſcious to your ſelves, that you act from truly *Pious Motives*, and in ſo *regular* a way, I doubt not you'll find the *Remembrance* of your Fidelity and Diligence in this great Work, *Sweet and Refreſhing.* For no Services we pay to God, do uſually yield us ſuch ſolid *Comfort* in the Review, as thoſe wherein we moſt ſincerely aim at his Glory, and are carried on by a fervent Love of him, in oppoſition to our worldly advantage and fleſhly Eaſe. Such inſtances of ſelf-denying Obedience, wherein we make all lower Intereſts of our own, ſtoop to the Superior, and more valuable Intereſt of God, are the moſt clear and ſatisfying Evidences of our own Sincerity. And, 'tis theſe that Raiſe us to the firmeſt *perſuaſion* of Divine *Acceptance*, and to the moſt lively *hope* of a future *Reward.* And ſure, the *Acceptance* and *Approbation*

of the great *God*, will infinitely countervail the *censures* and *reproaches* of blind and prejudic't *Men*; and his glorious *Recompence* will infinitely out-weigh all that we can possibly *Suffer* from their Malice or furious Revenge. They may studiously endeavour to misrepresent your actions and designs; But as it is to the Eyes of your great Judge, that you are chiefly concern'd to approve your selves, so you may trust so *liberal* a Master for a *bountiful* Retribution. Whereas I fear those that have the same opportunities and advantages with you to be serviceable in a Design, wherein the honour of God is so highly concern'd, but refuse their concurrence in it, (either because they are loath to take any *pains* in it, or loath to run any *hazard* by it) will one day find their Consciences charge 'em with the guilt of wretched *Neutrality* and *Lukewarmness* in the cause of God; and the review of it will render the thoughts of their final account less comfortable to 'em. O do not then to avoid the displeasure of Men incurr the more terrible displeasure of the Great God, nor forfeit his heavenly reward for fear of prejudicing your temporal Interest.

VII. We may from the *last Clause of Nehemiah's*, Petition farther observe, *That when we are engag'd in the most eminent Service to God, and perform it with the greatest Zeal and Fidelity; Yet we shou'd be so far from being proud thereof, that we shou'd rather retain a humbling sense of those sinful Defects that have attended it, which make us stand in great need of his abundant Mercy to Pardon and Spare us.*

Thus, Tho' *Nehemiah* appeals to God, as the Witness of his Integrity, in this important Service, and implores him to *remember him for it*; yet he was so far from imagining, that he had hereby merited any thing at his hands, that on the contrary, in the abasing sense of his own manifold failures therein, he adds this humble Request also, *and spare me according to the greatness of thy Mercy*. And indeed, so far are we in point of *Strict Justice*, from deserving any thing from the great God, that 'tis *meer Mercy* in him, to accept the best of our defiled Services, and to pardon the sinful Imperfections that cleave to 'em. And 'tis for that End, we stand in such absolute need of an attoning Mediator with him. So little reason have we, for any High and self exalting thoughts, of our own defective

Obedience,

Obedience, which needs the *blood of Sprinkling*, to cleanſe away the *Stains* of it.

O let us then *Learn, to imitate the Humility, as well as the Zeal and Courage of good Nehemiah.* Let neither our *Diligence* in this excellent Work, nor our conſiderable *Succeſs* in it, puff us up with over-weening thoughts of our ſelves. For there are manifold conſiderations that ſhould abaſe us, and hide pride from our Eyes. If there be any difference between us and profligate ſinners themſelves, we muſt chiefly aſcribe it to the diſtinguiſhing Grace of God, 'Tis *He* that inſpires us with Zeal and Reſolution for ſo hazardous and difficult a Work: 'Tis *He* puts an honour upon us, by giving us the opportunity and advantage of being employed in it. 'Tis *He* crowns our weak Endeavours with ſo unexpected ſucceſs. But eſpecially we ſhou'd conſider that we neither perform this nor any other part of the Work aſſign'd us, without great weakneſs and imperfection, without manifold frailties and failings, and in ſo faulty a manner, as needs infinite Mercy and Goodneſs to forgive our defects, and much more to accept and reward our ſincerity. So that we muſt after our pureſt Services *waſh our Robes and make 'em white in the blood of the Lamb*, 7 Rev. 14. After all we have done, we muſt ſay as our Lord has taught us, *That we are but unprofitable Servants that have only done that which was our duty to do.* 17 *Luke* 10 *v.*

And now I ſhall conclude this *Diſcourſe* with one *general Remark* concerning this eminent *Reformer Nehemiah*, viz. That in the whole Hiſtory of his Tranſactions, we may ſee very conſpicuous characters, not only of his ſignal *Piety*, but of his univerſal *Probity* and *Goodneſs*. His whole life ſeems to have been of a piece, moſt upright and unblameable. He was every way a bright Example to the Age in all pious and vertuous Converſation. And ſuch a man was moſt proper for ſo glorious and ſo difficult an Undertaking.

And herein above all I would recommend him as a *Pattern* to *thoſe* of you that appear ſo active in this neceſſary Work of publick Reformation. For *this* alone can put *honour* upon your worthy Enterprize, and give general *ſucceſs* to it. For, ſhou'd you be guilty of any of thoſe Vices your ſelves which

which you convict others of, this wou'd render all your pretences to Zeal for Reformation of manners, the object of publick *Contempt* and *Indignation*. Who wou'd not in this case upbraid you in the Language of the Apostle, *Thou that sayest another shou'd not commit Adultery, Dost thou commit Adultery? Thou that makest thy boast of the Law through breaking the Law dishonourest thou God?* 2 *Rom.* 22, 23. Nay, this is not enough, your Conversation must not only be free from these Vices, but from all other Instances of such known, and equally heinous Immorality and Wickedness, even *such* as human Laws may not take cognizance of, to Restrain and Punish. For if you, that will not *Whore* or *Swear*, or *Prophane* the *Lord's-Day*, yet will *Lye* or *Defraud*, *Grind* and *Oppress*, *&c.* Who will not be ready to Reproach your forwardness to Punish those other Sins, in the Language of our *Saviour*, *Thou Hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see more clearly to cast the mote out of thy Brothers Eye.* 7 *Matth.* 5. *v.* Who can forbear to say, *Physician heal thy self*; First strictly *reform thy own life*, before thou settest up for a *Reformer of the Age*. The *Snuffers* of the Sanctuary were to be of *pure Gold*. And their *Light shou'd shine brightly in all good Works*, who go about to reclaim others from *their Works of Darkness*. In a word, Your abounding in all the fruits of *Piety* and *Holiness*, *Justice* and *Charity*, *Humility* and *Meekness*, *Sobriety* and *Heavenliness*, will be the highest *Credit*, and the best *support* to the excellent Cause you are engag'd in, and most effectually *silence* all Reproaches against it. And indeed, the *Cause* you have espous'd, is so truly *honourable* in it self, so eminently *conducive to the Glory of God*, so highly *acceptable* to him, and *approv'd* by all good Men, that I doubt not you may apply to your selves for your Encouragement in prosecuting it, what God himself speaks to the Jews, when they began to Rebuild his Temple, *From this day I will bless you.* 2 *Hag.* 19. v. And I am truly persuaded, that his gracious Providence will give us occasion, from these our sincere and vigorous attempts against Irreligion and Vice, to *Date*, not only the *sensible Revival of the Internal Interest of true Religion*, but also the *Rising Prosperity and Glory of these Kingdoms*. So that, by becoming a *Reformed*, we shall become a *Flourishing* and *Happy* People.

FINIS.